

A

# LETTER

TO 4109. i. 4

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## Mr. F O S T E R

ON THE

### Subject of HERESY.

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By HENRY STEBBING, D.D.

Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty, and Preacher  
to the Honourable Society of *Gray's-Inn*.

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*The SECOND EDITION.*

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L O N D O N:

Printed for J. and J. PEMBERTON, at the *Golden*  
*Buck* against St. Dunstan's Church in *Fleetstreet*.

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M DCC XXXV.

Price Sixpence.



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A

LETTER to Mr. Foster  
ON THE  
Subject of HERESY.

SIR,



YOU have stept forth to do Justice to *yourself*. I hope you will now think it *seasonable* and *becoming* you, to do full Justice to the WORD OF GOD. Your Sermon upon HERESY has given great and just Offence; and the Point I have in View, as the main Subject of this Letter, is of too great Consequence to be suffered to be lost in the Triumphs which you have raised to *yourself* upon your own or your Adversaries Mistakes. As I had no Hand in writing those Letters in the *Weekly Miscellany*, which gave Rise to this Controversy; so I will have nothing to do with the Controversy as it stands upon that Foot. But resuming the Debate, as it were *de novo*, shall tell you plainly what it is in your Sermon that I *chiefly* dislike, and for *what Reasons* I dislike it.

A 2

Your

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Your main Drift, Sir, is to shew that "A HERETICK, in a BAD Sense, is one who knowingly espouses a false Doctrine, is in sincere in his Profession, and asserts and defends what he is *convinced* is contrary to Christianity, and consequently one who maintains and supports the Interest of a Faction, to serve some *base Designs* \*." This is your own Account. The View with which this Doctrine is to be supported, is (among other Things) to rectify some common, and (if you are right in your Notions) very *bad* Mistakes in the Exercise of Church Discipline. For thus you begin. "Among Christians themselves, the Word *Heresy*, for want of being rightly understood, has been in every Age an Engine of Defamation and Violence; by which Persons — of the best Characters, both for sound Knowledge and Integrity — have been stigmatized as Reprobates, DE BARR'D THE PRIVILEGES OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNION, and treated with the utmost Contempt and Barbarity †." Elsewhere you ask; "Shall we insist on PRIVATE ARTICLES OF OUR OWN, AND RIGHT NOTIONS IN INTRICATE AND PERPLEXING CONTROVERSIES; and presumptuously pronounce all who have not the same Strength of Understanding-

\* *Foster's Sermons*, second Edit. p. 290.

† Page 284, 285.

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“ derstanding — to be forsaken of God,  
“ and marked out for Destruction †?” As to  
*Defamation* and *Violence*, *reprobating* and  
*marking out for Destruction*; these are allowed  
to be very bad Things, which way soever  
the Notion of *Heresy* goes. But from these  
Passages, Sir, I think it appears, that one  
Part of your Intention in maintaining this  
Doctrine, *that he only is a Heretic, in a B A D  
Sense, who KNOWINGLY espouses a false  
Doctrine*, is to shew the *Unreasonableness* of  
requiring Mens Assent to *Articles* or *Confessions*, as *Terms* of *Christian Communion*, and of  
debarring them the *Privileges* of such *Com-  
munion* for *Heretical Opinions*. Which is far-  
ther evident from what you say a little after;  
“ If Heresy be an Error of the W I L L,  
“ and such *only* can be guilty of it who are  
“ condemned of themselves, how can we cer-  
“ tainly know, in most Cases, at least, whe-  
“ ther a Man be an Heretic or not? Let each  
“ of us put this *Question* to himself impar-  
“ tially, and if we cannot answer it to our Satis-  
“ faction, let us however learn thus much  
“ from our Ignorance, to be *modest* in our  
“ Censures we pass upon others \*.” Your  
Caution here, Sir, seems to be needless. Your  
Meaning is not only that we should be *modest*  
in our Censures of others ( which is cer-  
tainly a very good Rule ) but that **A L L** Cen-  
sures of others, excluding Men from the Pri-  
vileges

† Page 300.

\* Page 303.

vileges of Christian Communion for Heretical Opinions, is *wrong*; and so it must needs be, if your Notion of Heresy be *right*. For if those *only* are Hereticks who are condemned of *themselves*; that is (as you often explain your self) who act against the *Light* and *Conviction* of *their own Minds*, it is impossible that we should have any certain Rule to judge of Heresy; and without a Rule of Judgment all Judgment must be absurd. And this you expressly allow and contend for in the Words immediately following. “Indeed in the first “Age of Christianity, when the extraordinary Gifts of the Holy Ghost were communicated, of which one was the Gift of discerning Spirits, this Matter might be more easily decided.—But what Rule have we now these extraordinary Illuminations and Assurances are ceased, by which to conduct our selves in Enquiries of this Nature?” This is saying (in my humble Apprehension) that we neither have, nor ever had, since the extraordinary Gifts of the Holy Ghost have ceased, **A N Y** Rule by which to judge who are Hereticks. And (allowing your Notion of Heresy to be *just*) you say right. For who can judge of the Heart of Man but God?

This is what *appears* to me to be your Opinion, as it *certainly* is the Opinion of many others; and it is with a View to this single Point that I mean to talk with you. If your Account

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Account of Heresy (I say) is good, your Cause is good; let us see how you support it.

You say that *Heresy* generally (or in the general Notion of it) signifies no more than a Sect or Party in Religion; which is admitted. But whereas you say also that *Heresy* in the new Testament is most commonly used in an INDIFFERENT Sense, but seldom in a BAD one: This, Sir, is a great Mistake. It is used three times in the Epistles; all in a bad Sense. It is used six times in the Acts; and of these, three are in a bad Sense too. You indeed, Sir, have pressed into your Service 1 Cor. xi. 19. *For there must also be HERESIES among you, that they who are approved may be made manifest.* But I must needs demand it back again. You say that the Design of this Place was to shew that considering the various Tempers of Men, their different Views and Passions, &c. — it was natural to expect that they would divide into Parties about Religion — and that the Providence of God wisely permitted this for the Tryal of their Integrity. Very good, Sir! But how does it appear from hence that the Word *Heresy* is here used in an indifferent Meaning? Suppose the Apostle had said (as he might have said) there must be Gluttony and Drunkenness among you, that they who are approved may be made manifest; would it follow that the Words *Gluttony* and *Drunkenness* were not used to express something that was very bad? A wise and a

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good *Use* may be made of the Evils which God permits, yet those Evils will be Evils still, and may be *represented* as such. In like manner you cite *Acts* xxiv. 5. where St. *Paul* is said to be a *Ringleader of the Sect* (or *Heresy*) of the *Nazarenes*, as an Instance where the Word *Heresy* is used in an *Indifferent* Meaning. Absurdly again! For the *Use* of a Word is determined by the *Mind* or *Intention* of him that *speaks* it. If St. *Paul* had said of *himself* that he was of the *Sect* of the *Nazarenes*, your Observation had been right. But when *Tertullus* the *Roman* Orator who was accusing him before *Felix* said it, surely it was meant as a Term of *Reproach*; and so St. *Paul* understood it, as appears by his Answer. *After the Way which THEY CALL Heresy, so worship I the God of my Fathers.* Once more; in *Acts* xxviii. 22. where the *Jews* say to St. *Paul*, *As to this Sect* (or *Heresy*) *we know that it is every where spoken against*: The Word *Heresy* is not used in an *indifferent* Sense, (as you cite it) but in a *bad* one. Christianity is intended by the Expression, no doubt. But do you not consider, that the Speech comes from the Mouth of a *Jew*? I do not think this to be very material: But I take notice of these Mistakes, Sir, to shew you how ready you are to take things upon trust, and to run away with your own *Inventions*.

Let

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Let us now see, Sir, what use you make of this notable Observation. According to this Account (you say) the general Notion of a HERETICK is no more than this, viz. one that sets up to be the HEAD or CHOOSES to JOIN himself to a particular Religious Sect. If you mean here to tell us what you think ought to be the Notion of a Heretick, you say nothing to the Purpose. If you would have us understand that according to the Use of Language, this is the Notion of a Heretick; it is not true; nor will your Account make it so. For though *αἱρέτης*, in the general Notion of it, signifies a Sect indefinitely; yet *αἱρέτης* (a Heretick) is evermore pinn'd down to a bad Sense, as every common English Reader knows. If a Man should ask me what religious Sect I am of, I might very properly answer I am a Christian. But if a Christian says, such a Man is a *Heretick* or *Sectary* — the Word always carries with it a Charge of Error. There is but one Passage in Scripture where the Word *αἱρέτης* is used, and that is the Passage you are commenting upon; and there it is used in a *bad* Sense. But allowing your Notion that *Heretick* as well as *Heresy* will bear an *indefinite* Sense; what follows? Why it follows, say you, that *an Heretick in a BAD Sense MUST be one who KNOWINGLY espouses a false Doctrine, is INSINCERE in his Profession, and asserts and defends what he is CONVINC'D is contrary to Christianity, &c.* But where does this Consequence lie? I profess I cannot see it. You say, that to make

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a Man an Heretick, it must be the Matter of his CHOICE — to do what, Sir? Why, to set up to be the Head, or to JOIN HIMSELF to a particular Religious Sect, i. e. to fall in by external Profession with some Religious Sect; which is right. For the Profession is all he can chuse. A Man cannot chuse his Opinion, as he may his Company. Attend therefore a little. When a Man joins himself by Profession to any Religious Sect, UNLESS he does it in Opposition to the Light of his own Mind, maintaining that to be true which he believes to be false, he is (say you) no Heretick in a *bad* Sense, BECAUSE a Heretick at Large, (as it is now suppos'd) signifies indefinitely any one who joins himself to any Sect or Party. — Where, I ask, do you find this CONSEQUENCE? Have not I as much a Right to say that he is a Heretick in a *bad* Sense, who joins himself to any Sect professing a *bad Religion*? And will not this as well consist with your Account of the general Notion of a Heretick? How then (I say) does your CONSEQUENCE appear? You tell us immediately. *It will appear beyond Dispute, when you have consider'd your Text.* Why then it seems at present, it does NOT appear; and you are much in the right. For I challenge the best Logician upon Earth to draw such a Conclusion from such Premises. But if a Consequence, Sir, flows not from the Premises laid down, but from something else, it is (with respect to such Premises) NO Consequence. So that (in your own Account)

Account) you have all this while been saying nothing that will serve your Purpose.

To your Text then let us come, to find out that which as yet, it seems, is as great a *Secret* as ever. Your Text is this; *A Man that is an Heretick, after the first and second Admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemn'd of himself, (as a reprobate.)* Tit. iii. 10, 11. From this Passage, Sir, it is to be prov'd, that **HE ONLY** is a **HERETICK** in a **BAD Sense**, (*i. e. in such a Sense as will justify the Church in excluding him from the Privileges of Christian Communion*) who makes a Profession contrary to Christianity, in **OPPOSITION** to the **SENSE** and **CONVICTION** of **HIS OWN MIND**; and *you* think you have *done* it. I think that you have *not* done it, and, what is more, I think that you will never be *able* to do it. The Issue must shew who is mistaken. I will state all your Arguments fairly, and follow you in every Step you have taken.

You begin very unfortunately. According to St. Paul's Account in the Text, **an HERETICK is not only subverted, or turn'd aside from the true Faith; he not only entertains wrong Sentiments of Christianity** — How, Sir! Is a Heretick one who espouses a false Doctrine, *knowing* it to be such? And is he one too who is *turn'd aside from the true Faith, and entertains wrong Sentiments of Christianity*? You say that **no Body is a Heretick, in St. Paul's Sense, but he who knowingly espouses a false Doctrine.** And is it possible then to be true that he should be a Heretick,

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tick, who entertains wrong Sentiments? You tell us yourself it cannot be. *There can be no Heresy where there is, properly speaking, an Error of Judgment.* This may be owing to Laziness, Prejudice, partial Examination, and other very bad Causes; but HERESY IT CANNOT BE as long as a Man believes he is in the right.\* If then a Man cannot be a Heretick who believes he is in the right; How can a Heretick entertain wrong Sentiments? Is not every Man, in common Speech, suppos'd to believe every Sentiment which he is said to entertain? — This Part of your Exposition then, Sir, must needs be given up, as what utterly overthrows the very Thing you intend to support.

To go on. You say, that according to St. Paul's Account a Heretick is not only *subverted*, *i. e.* entertains wrong Sentiments, but *SINNETH*, that is (say you) *he doth this WILFULLY, and with an ILL INTENTION.* What is it, Sir, that he doth wilfully and with an ill Intention? Why, entertain wrong Sentiments, for so the Construction requires it should be understood. How is this, I pray, Sir? I can easily understand that a Man may make *Profession* of a wrong Opinion *wilfully*, and with an *ill Intention*: But how he should *entertain* a wrong Opinion, *i. e.* be *persuaded* of, or believe any wrong Opinion with an *ill Intention*, is quite incomprehensible. Nor do I understand how a Man can entertain a wrong Opinion *wilfully*, any otherwise than as the *Causes* which led him

\* Page 296, 297.

him into that wrong Opinion might be *wilful*, such as *Laziness, partial Examination*, and the like. And yet Error which arises from *these*, or any *other* bad Causes, you have already *excluded* from your Notion of Heresy. To save myself and you much Trouble, I will release you, Sir, from this Confusion and Self-contradiction, and make you speak Sense if I can. The Point you are to *prove* is, that by a Heretick St. Paul means *him only* who maintains wrong Opinions, *knowing them to be such*. To this purpose you observe, that the Apostle faith of such a one that he *sinneth*; and to draw any Argument from hence, every one sees it will be necessary to say, that no Man *sinneth* but he who acts *directly* against Conviction. Is this now, Sir, a Point that you will venture to maintain? I should hope that you will be better advis'd; and yet I see a good deal tending this way in the Passage that now lies before me. You say, that *such as have merely an erroneous Judgment can't be here meant*; because *Errors in the Understanding consider'd in themselves are not criminal, but naturally arise from the Weakness and Fallibility of human Reason*; they are in most Cases involuntary, and in many unavoidable, and therefore — the Persons describ'd by the Apostle as Sinners must be *wilful Corrupters and Opposers of the Christian Religion*: Such whose Minds are perverted by irregular Dispositions and Appetites, and who have resolv'd to sacrifice Truth and Virtue to the Gratification of their sensual Desires. The Design of

of this Passage is to set forth *who* are *Sinners*; the Question under Consideration is, whether *none* are *Sinners* but those who act *against Conviction*? It is hard to resolve, Sir, which Way we are to take you. The latter Part of the Sentence leads to the *Affirmative*; and yet should I now charge this upon you as your Opinion, there would presently be a new Outcry about *Misrepresentations*. You would take *Sanctuary* under your guarding Expressions — such as *merely erroneous* — Errors *considered in themselves* — they are in *most Cases* *involuntary* — in *many* *unavoidable*, and the like; and I should be treated (I suppose) in no very *decent* manner. I do not love *hard Words*, Sir, nor will I run the Hazard of burning my Fingers. Therefore here I leave this Point to rest till you will please to explain yourself; and shall only tell you, that unless you can prove that *nobody* is a *Sinner* but he who acts against the *Sense* and *Conviction* of his own Mind, your Argument from this Part of St. Paul's Description of a *Heretick*, that *he sinneth*, concludes nothing.

Your next Support is the *Direction* which St. Paul gives about the Manner of proceeding with a *Heretick*, which is to *admonish him only*. Here is no *Direction* to *instruct him*, from whence (say you) it evidently follows that *the Fault lay in the WILL, not in the UNDERSTANDING*. It will be a sufficient Answer to this *Shadow* of an Argument, to say, That as St. Paul was now giving Directions to a *Bishop*,

it was natural for him to mention such Particulars only, as specially concerned the *Office* of a Bishop, such were *Admonition* and *Rejection*; for as to *Instruction*, that lay in common among all the Pastors of the Church. To proceed therefore to your great Support of all, the last Part of St. Paul's Character of a Heretick; which is, that he is *condemned of himself*. The Greek Word is *αὐτοκαταρκτός*, which you (as many others have done before you) interpret as meaning that the Heretick stood condemned *in his own Judgment and Conscience*. You give no Reason for this Interpretation, but take it for granted, which no doubt is a very easy Way. But it is well worth considering, Sir, whether the Word will not admit of some other Meaning. I had occasion some Years ago to consider this Text. I have seen no Reason as yet to alter my Judgment as to the Interpretation I then gave of it, nor can I mend it; and therefore I will take the Liberty of transcribing it (with very little Variation) from my *Polemical Tracts, Defense of the Report*, p. 186, 187.

“ The Word *αὐτοκαταρκτός* seems here to be used *in sensu forensi*, as signifying one who stands condemned, not *by his own CONSCIENCE before God*, but, *by his own MOUTH before Man*. One who condemns himself, by confessing himself a Criminal; *i. e.* one whom the Law adjudges to be such, and upon whom therefore it pronounces *Condemnation*. For clearing this Interpre-

“ tation, let it be considered, that in ordinary  
“ Cases it was required, that antecedently to  
“ publick Admonition, the Crime of which  
“ a Man was accused, should be proved against  
“ him by the Testimony of competent Wit-  
“ ness. Thus our Saviour directs, Matth:  
“ xviii. 15, 16. *If thy Brother shall trespass  
“ against thee — and will not hear thee, take  
“ with thee one or two more, that in the Mouth  
“ of two or three WITNESSES every Word may  
“ be established.* And thus St. Paul both pre-  
“ scribed and practised. *This is the third Time  
“ I am coming to you; in the Mouth of two or  
“ three WITNESSES shall every Word be esta-  
“ blished,* 2 Cor. xiii. 1. And again; *Against  
“ an Elder receive not an Accusation but under  
“ two or three WITNESSES,* 1 Tim. v. 19. The  
“ Thing indeed in itself is highly reasonable  
“ and necessary. For it is absurd in a Judge to  
“ admonish a Man as an Offender, without  
“ sufficient Evidence that he is an Offender;  
“ which, because Men are ordinarily wont to  
“ endeavour to conceal their Faults, cannot  
“ therefore ordinarily be had, without the  
“ Testimony of those who were Witnesses of  
“ the Fact, or of some Overt-Act which tends  
“ to the Discovery of it. The Adulterer and  
“ the Fornicator sins in secret, and does not  
“ make it his Business to publish his own Wic-  
“ kedness; here therefore there is need of  
“ Witnesses. But if a Man be a Heretick, *i. e.*  
“ if he be the Leader, or open Abettor of any  
“ Sect, in opposition to the Apostolick Do-  
“ trine,

“ Etine; the Necessity of Witnesses is mani-  
“ festly superseded. In this Case he becomes  
“ his own Accuser, and with his own Mouth  
“ proclaims himself an Offender against the  
“ Order and Discipline of the Church; in the  
“ same Sense in which a Prisoner at the Bar is  
“ said to be self-condemn'd; who by pleading  
“ guilty to his Indictment, confesses himself  
“ an Offender against the Law of his Country:  
“ See now whether upon this Foot the Sense  
“ of the Passage will not be easy and na-  
“ tural. *A Man that is an Heretick, after*  
“ *the first and second Admonition reject;*  
“ *i. e.* Let a Heretick be only twice admo-  
“ nished, and if after this he doth not re-  
“ form, let him be excommunicated. Why  
“ so? Why it follows in the next Words;  
“ ΕΙΔΩΣ ὅπλον εργάτη δ τοις τοις, &c. be-  
“ cause such a one publishing his own Of-  
“ fence, thou KNOWEST that he is sub-  
“ verted. The Reason is brought to shew  
“ not why a Heretick should be excommu-  
“ nicated, but why the Bishop, in such a  
“ Case, should forthwith proceed to Admo-  
“ nition, without calling in that Evidence of  
“ the Fact, which was usual in other Cases:  
“ And to this may be well applied what was  
“ said upon another Occasion: *What need we*  
“ *any Witnesses? For we our selves have heard*  
“ *of his own Mouth.*—

“ As there is nothing in this Interpretation  
“ which is not agreeable to the Reason of the  
“ Thing; so for ought I can perceive, 'tis

“ such an Interpretation as the Greek Word  
“ will well admit of. *Αυτοκατακριτος* no  
“ where occurs in the sacred Writings but  
“ in this single Place, and therefore we must  
“ judge of its Signification by the Use of  
“ other Words which bear a near Relation to  
“ it. In the Sense in which I understand it,  
“ the word *αυτοκατακριτος* would be more pro-  
“ perly rendered SELF-ACCUSED than SELF-CON-  
“ DEMNED. And this is certain, that *κρινω* sig-  
“ nifies to accuse as well as to judge or condemn;  
“ and accordingly *κριος βλασφημιας* is a rail-  
“ ing Accusation, *Jude 9*. But this perhaps  
“ may not be thought decisive, because  
“ Compounds often vary from the Sense of  
“ their Originals. We must therefore con-  
“ sider whether *κατακρινω* will bear a Sense a-  
“ greeable to this Interpretation; and con-  
“ cerning this we may observe, that those are  
“ frequently said *κατακρινειν*, not only who  
“ do themselves as Judges determine or pass  
“ Sentence of Condemnation upon any Man,  
“ but those also who do indirectly or more  
“ remotely condemn a Man by being in some  
“ respect or other the *Instrument* in virtue  
“ whereof Condemnation is pronounced.  
“ Thus *Heb. xi. 7*. it is said of *Noah* that  
“ *κατεκριει την ποσμον*, he condemned the World,  
“ i. e. being a Preacher of Righteousness,  
“ and foretelling the approaching Vengeance  
“ of God against the World, which the  
“ World regarded not, he became the Means  
“ or Instrument of its Condemnation. But  
“ what

“ what comes nearer to our Purpose yet is,  
“ that those particularly through whose *Evi-*  
“ *dence or Testimony* Condemnation follows,  
“ are said *κατακρινεῖν* to condemn. Thus  
“ *Mat. xii. 41.* and *Luke xi. 32.* *The Men of*  
“ *Nineveh shall rise up in Judgment with this*  
“ *Generation* (κατακρινόντων ἀντίων) *and shall*  
“ *condemn it.* How so? Why certainly not  
“ by passing Sentence upon them, but by  
“ standing as Witnesses against them, that  
“ they were inexcusable in their Disobedi-  
“ ence: For thus it follows; *for they repented*  
“ *at the preaching of Jonas, and behold a*  
“ *greater than Jonas is here;* i. e. their Re-  
“ pentance under those lesser Means will be a  
“ convincing Proof that these greater which  
“ are now offered are abundantly sufficient,  
“ and consequently that those who reject them  
“ are utterly without Excuse. If then he  
“ who in general is the Means or Instrument  
“ of another’s Condemnation, and particu-  
“ larly who is in some respect or other an Evi-  
“ dence or Witness against him, may be said *κα-*  
“ *τακρινεῖν* to condemn him; it will follow by  
“ Parity of Reason, that he who in any re-  
“ spect bears witness against *himself*, and so  
“ becomes the Instrument of *his own Con-*  
“ *demnation*, may be said to be *αὐτοκατακρι-*  
“ *νεῖτος*, *condemned of himself.* Αφ ἐαυτῷ *κα-*  
“ *τακρινεῖν*, and *αὐτοκατακρινεῖτος*, are Words  
“ denoting one and the same Thing. Now  
“ *St. Paul* says expressly of him who con-  
“ demned another for a Fault of which he

" himself was guilty, that he did *εαυτην κατακρινειν* (Rom. ii. 1.) i. e. he did *virtually* or more *remotely condemn himself*, by bearing witness against himself, that the Crime of which he was guilty deserved Condemnation. And thus the unthrifly Servant (Luke xix. 22.) was *εν τε σιματος ειπετες κριτην*, condemned out of his own Mouth, because he had hid up his Talent in a Napkin, when, by his own Confession he knew that it would be required back again with Usury. Both these Forms of speaking agree in the general Idea of a Man's standing as an Evidence against himself, though the particular Way or Manner of doing it is different in each. Now for a Man to confess a Fact with which he is charged, or to be guilty of any publick notorious Offence, which the Law condemns, is one, and a very effectual Way of standing as an Evidence against himself, and consequently the Heretick whose Offence is always notorious, may very fitly be said to be *self-condemned*.

This, Sir, is what I offer'd as my own *Conjecture* above Ten Years ago; and I now offer it only *as such*. There are other Interpretations which some perhaps may like better. But this appears to me to be the true one. And if it be but *probable*; if it be but *supportable*; all the Weight you have laid upon this Text will fall to the Ground.

But whether *this* Interpretation be right or not, I think it a very clear Case that *yours* is *wrong*. The Passage is a Direction to *Titus*, Bishop (as we say) and (as you must own) an Officer of the first Distinction in the Church of *Crete*, who had it in Charge to *reject Hereticks*. It is not to be suppos'd that *Titus* was the *single* Person in the Christian Church who had such a Trust. For the separating Hereticks from Christian Fellowship was a *standing Power* in all Churches at that Time, as it has been from that Time to this Day: For the Proof of which I shall content myself to refer you to the following Passages, to be consider'd at your Leisure. *Rom. xvi. 17.* *2 Theff. iii. 6, 14.* *2 John x.* *2 Tim. ii. 16, 17, 20, 21.* compar'd with *1 Cor. v. 6, 7, 9.* And the *Reasons* for such Discipline which are given in Scripture, will equally agree with *all Churches* and *all Times*; which were, *First*, The Shame of the Offenders, *2 Theff. iii. 14.* *Secondly*, The Preservation of the Body of Christ from the Infection of their Doctrines, *Rom. xvi. 18.* *2 Tim. ii. 17.* That there can be no such Power in the Church *now* (if your Notion of a Heretick be admitted) is manifest; and this, I suppose, is what you would have. But *why* would you have it so, Sir, if the *Reasons* for this Discipline are *as good* now as they were 1700 Years ago, and *will be as good* to the End of the World? But what I would observe to you is, that (according to your Notion) there *could* be no such Power, *i. e.* no such *standing Power* even at the Beginning; and

and to what Purpose then was the Rule given ? To know a Heretick, you ~~agree~~, we must know *his Heart*. And was the Knowledge of Mens Hearts ever a *standing* Power in the Church ? Do not the Apostles speak of this as the sole Prerogative of God ? *Thou, Lord, which knowest the Hearts of all Men, &c.* Acts i. 24. You tell us, that the Gift of *DISCERNING SPIRITS* was *ONE of those Gifts of the Holy Ghost which were communicated in the first Age*; and say, that *Titus cannot be suppos'd, considering his Character and Office, to have been without it*. But how do you prove that the Gift of *discerning Spirits* signifies the Power of *knowing Mens Hearts*? Or if it does signify this, why do you say that *Titus*, considering his *Character and Office*, can't be supposed to have been *without it*? What was *Titus's Character and Office*? A *Bishop*. And can you shew, or is it reasonable to be supposed, that *every Bishop of the Church at that time had this Gift*? I am not *certain*, nor you neither, that *any of the Apostles ever had the Knowledge of Men's Hearts communicated to them by the Holy Ghost*. The Text above-cited seems to imply the contrary. Once I was of Opinion that *Acts v. 3. and Chap. xiv. 9.* referred to this Power. † But those Texts will bear other Interpretations. It is not worth while to dispute this Point. Sure I am it was no *standing Gift*. The Apostles had it *not* when *Matthias* was chosen to the Apostleship. Why so? Was there ever greater Occasion for it? Besides, why

† *Polem. Tract. ubi supra, p. 192.*

why would it not have been as properly exercised in admitting Men into the Church, as in casting them out; and in casting out those who covered over a *naughty Heart* by fair Professions, as those who opposed the Truth wilfully? But do we ever read of any such Instances? Or can you shew any good Reason why (if there was such a Gift) it *ceased* with the Apostles, and thereby made an Act of Discipline (equally useful at *all* Times) *impracticable* for ever after? These are Points, Sir, which you should have *considered* before you took it for granted that the Power of rejecting Hereticks *rested* upon the Power of *knowing Men's Hearts*; and you should likewise have considered whether, *in fact*, upon the Cessation of Miracles, the Discipline ceas'd too. If you had done this, Sir, you must have seen that there is a great deal yet to be *done* before your Interpretation can be made to stand upon firm Ground. —— But you are *too hasty* to weigh Things with *Coolness*.

To go on to your other Texts. You produce several Passages, to shew that Heresy is a *Work of the Flesh*, and that the Hereticks of those Times are set forth as Men of very *immoral Lives*. We will have no Dispute, Sir, what Hereticks *were formerly* as to this Point, or what they *are now*. It is allow'd you, that *in Fact* they generally *were* what they are in Scripture represented to have been, *bad Men*. But *bad* as they were, you will find it very hard to

to prove that they were condemn'd in their own *Consciences* in the Opinions which they maintain'd. There are many bad Men at this Day who maintain Opinions which you and I think wrong; but their bad Lives is no Argument that they profess them *against Conviction*: I think, Sir, I have your Consent to this. For you say of Men of *vicious Lives*, that *they are better rejected for their IMMORALITY, which is notorious and palpable, than for HERESY, of which we CAN'T SO CERTAINLY JUDGE.*\* Which is a Confession from you, that a *bad Life* is no *certain Proof* that a Man maintains a *false Doctrine knowing it to be such*. But supposing that the ancient Hereticks were described in Scripture as *self-condemned*, ( in your sense of *Self-condemnation* ) it would not follow, that being *self-condemned* is *essential* to the *Notion of Heresy*. It is one thing to say what Hereticks *are*; another to say what they *must be*.

Nothing now remains to be consider'd in your Sermon but your *Inferences*. To these I have one short Answer to give. Either they rightly follow from the Interpretation of your Text, or they do not. If they do *not* they are nothing to the Purpose. If they *do*, they can stand no longer than the Foundation that supports them; and if your *Interpretation* is wrong they must fall of course.

You

\* P. 364.

You will now, Sir, perhaps be desirous to know what is my Notion of Heresy. And I will tell it you shortly and plainly. The Apostles were under the Influence of the Holy Ghost, and judged of the Faith by which we are to be saved by his *infallible Spirit*. By the *same* Spirit they gave forth the Scriptures, which *we* receive as the Rule of our Faith. In the use of these you plead for *private Judgment*, and so do I. And if you will but allow the *same* Liberty of Judgment to the Ministers of Christ in the Execution of their Office, which you allow to every single Man *besides* in the Direction of his Conduct in *all* Cases (which one would think to be a very *reasonable Demand*) this you will see; That they who *to them* shall *appear* by the best use of their Judgments under the Direction of God's Word to have departed from the Faith (whether *with Knowledge* or *against Knowledge*; whether *sincerely* or *insincerely*) are *to them* Heretics, and must *by them* be treated as such. This I conceive to be perfectly agreeable to St. Paul's Rule, and to all the Directions we have in Scripture concerning this matter. *Mark them* (i.e. *A L L* them) *which cause Divisions and Offences contrary to the Doctrine which we have learned, and avoid them*, Rom. xvi. 17. — *Withdraw yourselves from EVERY Brother that walketh disorderly*, 2 Thess. iii. 6. — *If ANY Man obey not our word by this Epistle, N O T E that Man*, ver. 14. — *If there come ANY unto*

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*you, and bring not this Doctrine, receive him not, 2 John x.* The Directions you see are *absolute* and without *distinction*, founded upon the *single Consideration* of their *teaching other Doctrines*. And the Church having now no Help to know what are *other Doctrines* but *her own Judgment* directed by the Scriptures, MUST act according to her own Judgment. According to this Account (I confess) it will follow, that a Man may be a Heretick to *one* Church who is not a Heretick to *another*; and a Heretick to *both* who is not a Heretick to *God*. This may be lamented as the Effect of human Weakness and Frailty. But now Infallibility is ceased, otherwise it cannot be; unless you will say, that because Infallibility is ceased, therefore we are to have *no Church* or *no Sacraments*; or if we are to have Sacraments, that they are to be open to *all* who shall *demand* them, whatever *Opinions* they hold and profess. There is no *Medium* in the Case, \* and therefore tell me, Sir, honestly and plainly what you will stand by. Will you say that *Faith* is *nothing worth*? Here you leave us in the dark again. For what can we certainly gather from such Expressions as these? *Heresy has been made to signify MERE ERRORS, Errors in SPECULATION, of NO IMPORTANCE to the Cause of solid Virtue, or the Happiness of Mankind.*†---Shall we insist on---right Notions in INTRICATE AND PERPLEXING CONTROVERSIES, —— *condemn*

\* See *Polem. Traits of Articles and Confessions.*

† Page 286.

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----condemn others for SPECULATIVE ERRORS---  
think to make Attonement---by a fierce and out-  
ragious Zeal for TRIFLES ||. ---Why should  
we be forward to charge Heresy on our Brethren  
for EVERY TRIFLING DIFFERENCE :? What do  
you mean, Sir, by your *Trifles*; your intricate  
and perplexing *Controversies*; your *speculative*  
*Errors of no Importance*, &c.? Would you tell  
us that ALL *Questions* about what is neces-  
sary to be *believed* to qualify Men for Christian  
Fellowship, are *Questions* about *Trifles*; *Questi-*  
*ons of no Importance*? If you would; say so;  
and I shall understand you: If you would not;  
tell me who they are that plead for rejecting  
Men from Communion for such matters.  
Churches may *err* as well as single Men, in  
considering what *is* or is *not* of Importance  
enough to be made an Article of Communion.  
But no Church I think has yet been so bad, or is  
ever likely to be so bad, as to make any Point of  
Faith an Article of Communion, but what  
it *judges* or *believes* to be of *Importance*.

I must now take the Liberty, Sir, of gi-  
ving you two or three Cautions. In the first  
Place, I desire you would not infer from this  
Account of Heresy, that I make Faith an  
*arbitrary Thing*; for no such Inference will  
follow. You and I, Sir, must judge for our-  
selves, what is the Faith taught us in the  
Scriptures. But be our Judgments what they  
will; Faith will be just what it is. Men may

D 2

err;

¶ Page 300, 301.

∴ Page 304.

err; but Faith is subject to no Variation. The Case is the same, with respect to Churches. They may Decree what *they* judge to be the Faith taught in Scripture; and they may decree *wrong*. If they *do*, still, Faith alters not; nor is their Judgment a *Rule* to any but *themselves*. Therefore,

In the next Place, Sir, I desire I may not be censured as one who am *for* devoting *Men* to *Destruction* for Errors in Faith, meaning by *Destruction* the Wrath of Almighty God. The Judgment of the Church is a *Rule* for *Discipline*, not the *Law* of *Salvation*. God may *save* those whom the Church *rejects*, and *will* do so if they are rejected *unworthily*. Or if the Church judges *right* of their Case, so far as it appears to *Men*, they may, through the Sincerity of their Hearts, appear worthy of Acceptance in the Eyes of God. These Things, Sir, are *plain* and *clear*; but you, and such Writers as you are, love perpetually to confound them. For Instance. No *honest* *Man* (you say) *can possibly be a Heretick*. Why so? Why, because human Nature is frail and fallible, and it is not to be doubted but that the wise and merciful Governor of the World will make great Allowances — You go on to ask particularly; *What is the Ground of our Acceptance with God under the Dispensation of the Gospel?* And your Answer is, in short, **SINCERITY**. Now, if a sincere Desire to know and do the Will of God be the

ONLY

ONLY CONDITION of obtaining the Christian Salvation; must not ALL Mistakes which are consistent with general Sincerity, be consistent likewise with a State of Favour with God? Well; And what of all this, Sir? Every honest Man (say you) will be saved. Allow it; what follows? Why, that no honest Man can be a Heretick. But if I should say (as upon your Principles I might say) that every Heretick will be saved by his Sincerity; What would become of your Consequence? Put your Argument into Form, and see how it will stand;

*Every honest Man will be saved — But  
No Heretick can be saved, — Therefore  
No honest Man can be a Heretick.*

The minor Proposition must be assumed, to make your Argument good. But where do you learn that no Heretick can be saved? Take my Notion of Heresy, and you cannot have it from Scripture that no Heretick can be saved, if what you say be true. That Sincerity is the only Condition of obtaining Salvation under the Gospel. For in my Notion of Heresy, a Heretick may be sincere; and therefore my Notion of Heresy (your Principle notwithstanding) may be true. As to the Doctrine here maintained, viz. That Sincerity is the only Condition of obtaining Salvation under the Gospel, I have at present nothing to do with it; and therefore I shall leave you to the Mercies of Mr. CHANDLER, which

which no doubt will be great towards a *Bro-*  
*ther*, though ( as I find by some Papers lately  
published ) he has been very *severe* upon some  
other People, for saying the self-same Thing  
which you now say.

The last Caution I have to give you is ; let  
me not be charged with being for **P E R S E-**  
**C U T I O N**. For this too will be very unjust.  
I only say **w h o** are **H e r e t i c k s** ; and how **H e-**  
**r e t i c k s** are to be treated *by the Church*, with  
respect to *Christian Communion*. How they  
are to be treated by *Civil Magistrates*, with  
respect to the *Privileges of Civil Society*, I do  
not say ; nor is it any part of the Argument.  
Yet this too is a very common *Abuse*. Who-  
ever pleads for the Right of judging *Heresy*,  
he is presently represented by some Gentlemen  
as a *Persecutor*.

I have offered you no new Matters, Sir.  
The Doctrine I maintain, has been a Do-  
ctrine ever since the Christian Church had a  
Being. The Arguments I have used, and the  
Cautions I have given, have been said over  
and over by many Writers. And yet it is very  
remarkable, Sir, that in your Sermon upon  
Heresy, you have not vouchsafed to take *one*  
Word of Notice of any one Argument that  
has been offered on the other side of the Que-  
stion. I hope, Sir, this is not the *best* Evi-  
dence you have to give us of your *Sincerity*.  
If you found those Objections *too hard* for you to  
*answer*, you was in the right to *drop* them ;  
but

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but then you should have let the Text alone. *Answerable* or *unanswerable*, every Reader now sees that they are not *contemptible*; and it will be expected that you *clear* your Interpretation of these Difficulties.

Whether I am a Writer considerable enough to deserve your Notice, must be left to your self. I only tell you, Sir, that if you shall think fit to Answer, you have the Points before you to which I *expect* you should give an Answer; and I shall hope for *Reasons*, not *Reproaches*.

*I am,*

*S I R,*

*Yours, &c.*

June 20, 1735.

**HENRY STEBBING.**

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